

The Ainsworth Unit Bulletin

SPECIAL EDITION

SHIFTING DIRECTIONS

This special edition of **The Ainsworth Unit Bulletin** is to let you know that the Ainsworth Irrigation District (District) is no longer pursuing title transfer. In action taken at a Special Board Meeting held on February 16, 2005, the District approved a motion to request renewal of the Ainsworth Irrigation District's long term water service contract with the Bureau of Reclamation. We have now begun working with the District on the process of contract renewal.

DO WE HAVE TO START ALL OVER AGAIN?

Yes, and no.

Contract renewal is a different action than title transfer. Both actions are subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Because the District is no longer pursuing title transfer, the NEPA process for that proposed action has been terminated. The NEPA process for contract renewal is beginning.

Reclamation conducted two public meetings on April 23 and 24, 2003, at Ainsworth and Valentine which were attended by over 150 interested persons. These meetings were held to gather input and identify environmental issues concerning a possible title transfer.

Even though we are now working on contract renewal, much of the environmental data and public input gathered during title transfer scoping will still be useful in contract renewal.

WILL THE PUBLIC BE INVOLVED?

Yes. Reclamation is required by law to evaluate and disclose to the public the effects of a major federal action, such as contract renewal, and to identify a range of reasonable alternatives. This process is outlined in NEPA.

We are currently working to determine the direction that public participation will take. We are considering whether or not to draft the environmental document without further public meetings. To assist us in additional scoping to prepare the environmental document, we are considering a number of venues including:

- a) Providing information and updates through the use of this informational brochure.
- b) Posting information on our website.
- c) Taking additional comments from you by email or postal mail.

You will also have an opportunity to examine and comment on the draft environmental document when it is completed. Notice of the availability of the draft document will be published in newspapers of general circulation and copies will be made available at several locations for review.



HOW DO WE GET UP TO SPEED?

A great deal of information about the Ainsworth Contract Renewal is available on the Nebraska-Kansas Area Office website at <http://www.usbr.gov/gp/nkao>. You can familiarize yourself with NEPA and the contract renewal process and how they fit together. You can also view the flowcharts for preparing an environmental document. If you do not have internet access you can get this information by contacting our office at the address below.

CONTRACT RENEWAL RELATED INFORMATION:

The Ainsworth Irrigation District's water service contract will expire on December 31, 2006. On March 9, 2005, Representative Tom Osborne introduced H.R. 1197 to extend the water service contract for the Ainsworth Unit. On March 14, 2005, the bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Water and Power.

WHAT NOW?

We'll be getting back to you in the near future. We just wanted to touch base and let you know that Reclamation is now working on contract renewal, not title transfer, with the Ainsworth Irrigation District.

Comments collected by Reclamation as part of the title transfer process, some of which may also pertain to contract renewal, are available on the above-referenced website.

If you have questions, email them to josullivan@gp.usbr.gov or by postal mail to Judy O'Sullivan, Public Involvement Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation, at PO Box 1607, Grand Island, NE 68802. Also, if you do not wish to remain on the mailing list for the Ainsworth Unit Bulletin or if you know someone who would like to begin receiving the bulletin, please contact Ms. O'Sullivan.

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P.O. Box 1607
Grand Island, NE 68802